

**DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL**

*The California Highway Patrol is a law enforcement and traffic safety agency reporting to Business, Transportation and Housing Agency Secretary Maria Contreras-Sweet and Governor Gray Davis.*



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***CHP THANKSGIVING WISHES URGE SOBRIETY AND SAFETY ON THE ROAD***

With Thanksgiving right around the corner, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) is urging motorists to drive with care and consideration. According to CHP Commissioner Dwight O. Helmick, "With a little planning, common sense and concern for others, Thanksgiving 2001 can be filled with happy memories."

Between 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 21 and midnight, Sunday November 25, the CHP will implement a Maximum Enforcement Period (MEP). "During this time, every available officer will be working so your family can safely arrive at and enjoy holiday celebrations," Helmick said.

During an MEP, the CHP places major emphasis on safety belt use, driving under the influence (DUI), speeding, and other aggressive driving behavior.

Enforcing the safety belt law has proved to be very effective in improving safety on California's roads and highways. "Now that nine out of ten motorists are buckled up, we want to encourage that other tenth to use a safety belt. We would like people to give themselves a life-saving habit and obey the law at the same time," Helmick said.

The CHP reports that drinking and driving is still the greatest single cause of traffic fatalities.

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Last year 33 percent of the 3,331 fatal collisions involved alcohol. 1,233 persons lost their lives in those crashes. “If you intend to drink, plan ahead and make sure you have a designated driver to get you and your loved ones home safely,” the Commissioner said.

Safe speeds are also a critical part of safe driving. Driving too fast for conditions is the largest single cause of all collisions. “Slowing down will give you more time to react in an emergency, will enable you to stop more quickly if you have to, and will generally make your trip that much more comfortable,” Helmick added.

In addition to placing special emphasis on these traditional concerns, the CHP is also focusing on drivers who lose their cool while traveling in holiday congestion.

“While you let us watch out for these dangerous drivers, you can do some things to minimize your risks of encountering one,” the Commissioner said.

- Never tailgate – leave at least two to three seconds between you and the car ahead and a second or two more when the road is slick or the visibility limited.
- Always use your turn signal when changing lanes or turning.
- If your are driving more slowly than the traffic around you, pull over and allow others to pass.
- Avoid blocking the right turn lane.

If the holiday brings wet or foggy weather, drivers should reduce their speed and increase their following distance. “As visibility decreases, it is important to reduce speed so you can react to hazards ahead. Instead of two seconds between you and the car ahead, leave three or four. And in fog, make sure you are keeping your speed down by checking your speedometer frequently,” the Commissioner said.

According to Commissioner Helmick, the Thanksgiving MEP is also an Operation CARE

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(Combined Accident Reduction Effort) holiday. Operation CARE is a joint program of the nation's highway patrols that places special safety emphasis on interstate highways during holiday periods. CARE highways in California include Interstates 80, 40, 15 (San Bernardino to the Nevada border) and 5 (Bakersfield north to the Oregon line).

"I urge every driver to be rested and sober when they get behind the wheel. Make sure every person in your vehicle is properly buckled into a child safety seat or a safety belt, and treat other drivers like you want to be treated. Let's all make this a Thanksgiving to remember for all the right reasons," the Commissioner concluded.

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